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## VICS — 40 Years and Celebrating

Bob Colburn

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# VICS – 40 Years and Celebrating

Father Bob Colburn, CSSp  
VICS Director

A wife and mother of two, a nurse most of her life, the strength of her extended family, the one so involved in the community and a VICS volunteer who served overseas as a nurse in Zambia and Ethiopia — Arlene Bizzarri is so typical of the more than 750 professional women and men who have served overseas during the past 40 years. Single, married, men, women, families, they have left the comfort and security of Canada and they have headed to the furthest corners of the world from Papua New Guinea to Kiribati, from Bolivia to Nicaragua, from Ghana to Tanzania, from Zanzibar to Yemen.

As teachers, nurses, doctors, welders, dentists, administrators, pharmacists, physiotherapists, social workers, lab technicians, maintenance managers, nutritionists, computer experts, accountants, mechanics, community development workers, engineers, journalists, pilots, agriculturalists, building contractors, electricians, architects and carpenters, they have served in more than 50 countries world wide and they have made a difference in the lives of the people with whom they have worked. Some have done grand things like supervising the building of a cathedral, others have taught future government ministers, others have saved lives; all have done well and we are proud of each one of them.



Arlene ran hospitals. She worked without electricity, often with a shortage of water, working long hours and saving lives along the way. For Arlene it was not heroic, it was simply giving back a little of what God had blessed her with. She taught folks that it was just fine to shake hands with a leper and she loved the people of Africa with a clear devotion and a commitment that continued long after she had returned to her life in Canada.

As I write this we have just celebrated Arlene's life and her courageous battle with cancer. Friends and family gathered to bid her a blessed journey from this world to the next. Many returned VICS volunteers came for the funeral service for we are a close family. Condolences were received from VICS around the world. Arlene's daughter paid tribute to the years her mother spent working in Africa. Those years changed her mother, they changed the way she viewed life and raised her children. Arlene's daughter is now a nurse and everyone asks, "When will you journey overseas with VICS?"

Thanks Arlene and thank you to all those who have served with VICS, to their families and to our benefactors. This calendar is for you! ■

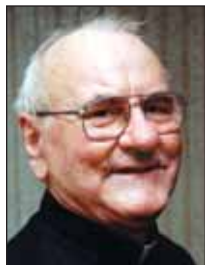
Front cover: Linda Dobni, VICS volunteer serving in Ethiopia

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## Desmond McGoldrick 1971–1973



Fr Des McGoldrick founded VICS in 1971. Prior to that he had been a high school teacher in Kenya and a retreat giver and preacher of parish missions throughout Canada.

His trademark greeting, an easy-going “Hello there!” announced his arrival. But there was nothing easy-going about his religious beliefs. A parishioner remembered him as a pastor: “One of my favourite stories was when some parishioners wanted the altar moved from the stage to the ground floor. This was before we had a church building. Father agreed to try it out and then do a survey. A few weeks later he announced the survey result: The majority wanted the altar to remain on the floor — but since it was an ‘insignificant’ majority, it was going back on to the stage where it belonged.

“He was a dynamic preacher. You knew where you stood. He was a great black and white man — none of this conscience nonsense. His homilies helped us focus on life’s purpose.”

“For a priest, pastoral work is *it!*” he said — even though he was no stranger to occasional frustration: “You can corral horses,” he said, “but you can’t corral people. You have to be able to roll with the punches.”

## Dermot Doran 1973–2001



VICS husband and wife, George and Marlene Smadu edited *Believing as Jesus Believed, VICS in the World*. They wrote: “Dermot is famous for his long phone conversations, filled with stories and adventures, all the while providing him a chance to assess the mental, spiritual and social well being of the person with whom he is conversing. Dermot is always present to those he is with, sharing his energy, his view of the world and his humour, in a way that inspires and supports.

“What will always be the most important memory of a Christmas in Wewak, Papua New Guinea, was two straight days of Dermot’s storytelling — interrupted only by short meal and sleep breaks — about his life as a missionary priest in Nigeria. We felt his pain and sorrow when he and many other priests were ousted from

Nigeria at the time of the civil war in Biafra. We felt as though we knew the pilots he managed to recruit in a seedy bar in Portugal to fly planeloads of cargo — through enemy gunfire — to thousands of people suffering in Biafra.

“After Biafra he moved to Canada, joined the VICS organization at its early stages, and spent 28 years meeting the needs of people and communities in many countries around the world, working with nurses, doctors, teachers, office managers, builders, farmers, social workers, community developers ... the list goes on. He confronted power structures and lack of resources, dealt with governments and embassies in many countries, cut red tape and circumvented processes, all with his goal in mind: *Believing as Jesus Believed*.”

## Daniel Abba 2007–2010



“There is sadness around the office ... our friend is gone. Three years ago Daniel Abba came full force into our lives at VICS. His passion and love for the people and mission of VICS grew tremendously. Everyone who met him loved him instantly. We are so proud of Daniel and happy for him as he becomes Superior of the Nigeria Northwest Province of the Spiritans. It is a bittersweet moment for all of us. We will miss Daniel but we will always be thankful for his friendship, passion, humour, hearty laugh and big smile.”

— Roni Iwanciwski, VICS Secretary

Daniel himself writes; “I have come to realize that once you have been involved with VICS, you can never get out of it ... I am glad that I have the opportunity to continue to be involved with VICS as the agent for Africa.”

## Robert Colburn 2001–2007, 2010–



The once again Director can’t break away from VICS! Not that he wants to: “Sometimes life’s surprises can be filled with joy, sometimes with challenges and sometimes with a sense of bewilderment. I think I presently fit into the latter.”

Bob succeeded Dermot Doran as the third Director of VICS in 2001. He had been overseas with VICS in Kenya and the Gambia and on his return to Canada he entered the formation program and became a Spiritan. Ordained in 1989 Fr Bob worked in vocation ministry, then as pastor in Stettler, Hinton and Edmonton before taking over as the third Director of VICS in 2001. Seven years later his fellow Spiritans elected him as their Provincial Superior.

Back again as Director of VICS, his enthusiasm, energy, outspoken support and personal interest in each volunteer continue to endear him to current and former overseas members.